

AMATEURADIO

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and Amateur Satellite Services

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The Winter That Didn't End — Almost

The snows from the freak April blizzard are gone now, but the memories of the winter's severe storms are indelibly etched in the minds of millions. When the need arose, Amateur Radio Operators were there to assist. From tornadoes in the south to blizzards in the north, from the plane crash in Washington to the mud slides in California, hams were there when normal communication modes were not enough.

Alabama

In Alabama, it all started on January 2 when the National Weather Service (NWS) began telling of an approaching cold front pushing a broad band of severe weather ahead of it. This front had already spawned tornadoes and flash flooding in the western and mid-south states. Late on the afternoon of the third, NWS began to issue tornado and flash food watches for the middle third of the state, as a line of thunderstorms began to enter Alabama from Mississippi. The storms contained the expected high winds and heavy rains; conditions were favorable for tornadoes. All across the state, Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) groups began to bring their local nets into standby status.

First came the heavy rains. Heavy, blinding rains. Amateur Radio mobile units began to report cars stopping on the side of the road, unable to continue because the

drivers couldn't see. Then, the dreaded tornado. Warnings went out. Still more reports came in as small to medium twisters began to slash paths across the central part of the state. On at least two occasions, a warning would be lifted for an area only to be reestablished minutes later, as a second twister would follow nearly the same path as its predecessor. Oftentimes, at the request of NWS, amateur mobile units were dispatched to verify reports of touchdowns in remote areas.

At 11:30 P.M., as the last watches were being lifted, another small twister dropped from the sky in Chilton County. Amateurs remained on duty until the early morning hours, watching to see if anything else was going to develop. Finally, NWS radar indicated all clear for Alabama, with nothing new developing. The storms had caused considerable property damage but, thanks to early warning, very little personal injury was reported.

On the 5th, sleet and freezing rain entered the state from the west. By mid-morning, sleet mixed with snow began to fall in the Birmingham area. As it hit the frozen ground, a treacherous film of ice formed. The city panicked, and a mass exodus began, but too late. Motorists, trying to get home, found massive traffic jams at the base of an incline. Cars, ill-equipped to travel under these conditions, soon turned the streets into giant parking lots as the drivers abandoned them and tried to walk to safe shelter.

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Winter Continued

By mid-afternoon, the sleet became "thick rain," the ground, frozen hard, turned it into a 3-inch layer of ice. The temperature dropped to just below the freezing mark. The thick rain began to cling to trees, power lines and telephone lines. Alabama's main timber crop is pine. Pine trees exhibit the unusual characteristic of having all of their foliage at the top. Within a couple of hours, these ice-laden trees began to bend their heavy heads toward the ground, and toward power lines and telephone lines. As the trees contacted the power, the union was marked by a brilliant shower of sparks, lighting up the crystalline sky with an eerie green flash that could be seen for miles. NWS first reported these flashes as thunderstorms, only later to retract their statement. Following the flash subdivisions and housing complexes were plunged into a deep, cold darkness. Before it was over, nearly a quarter of a million homes were without power or heat. Some would not have power restored for a week.

The governor of Alabama acted quickly. He activated civil defense offices throughout the state and ordered National Guard armories open to provide shelter for stranded motorists and those without power and heat. Amateur Radio once again responded to the call. Civil defense emergency operation centers were manned, and contact was made with other agencies. During the first few hours of the storm, literally hundreds of messages were relayed via Amateur Radio for these agencies, as the telephone system began to falter under the heavy calling load.

By early Wednesday morning, the skies began to clear. The temperatures during the night, however, had dropped into the teens, cementing "ole man winter's" death grip on the state.

All major thoroughfares were closed to vehicles, and

many secondary roads were impassable because of fallen trees and dangling power lines.

All over the state, vehicular traffic was at a standstill. Many life-and-death situations began to arise. Outpatients who needed daily treatment at local hospitals found that even ambulances were unable to move. Civil defense offices around the state began to put out pleas for volunteers with four-wheel-drive vehicles to transport these people. As volunteers arrived they were paired with a ham, and Amateur Radio was used to dispatch them to where they needed to be. These vehicles were used to transport needed relief to hospital staffs and other places that had to continue to supply life services.

On Wednesday heavy snow was falling in Mississippi. By late evening, the storm began moving slowly into Alabama, blanketing the layers of ice with four inches of snow. More trees fell, knocking out more power in areas that had been spared. The four-wheel-drive volunteers and their ham partners worked throughout the night transporting families to warm shelter and hot food, and taking others to wherever they needed to be.

Thursday brought very little melting of the snow and ice. Most major roads remained closed, and travel on secondary roads was even more hazardous. An army of volunteers from every walk of life worked tirelessly throughout the day and night, maintaining the necessities of life for those in need. Friday dawned, and the mercury finally began to creep above the freezing mark. Still, most major roads remained closed until late afternoon. Hams throughout the state remained on duty at Emergency Operations Centers and shelters until such time as the directors deemed they were no longer

(Continued next page)



This emergency communications van, owned and operated by the L'anse Creuse Radio Club (Michigan), demonstrates the commitment Amateur Radio operators have to being prepared for any emergency that may arise.

(Photo by Brian Cox)



Ernest Hartley stands in front of an overturned delivery truck. Hartley used Amateur Radio to contact authorities, who sped aid to the driver.
(Photo by Terry Ketron)

needed. They then went home to their families, many of which had been without heat or light since Tuesday evening.

St. Louis, Missouri

St Louis was hit with a particularly bad snow storm in late January. Ham radio operator John Martin was ready for any emergency. For over two years, the hams had been working with the local Office of Civil Preparedness developing contingency plans and training for emergency services.

About 25 hams were involved in the communications effort. They worked at the emergency center, manned radios at hospitals and police stations, and rode with drivers of four-wheel drive vehicles, keeping everyone in touch with the central office.

"We had a lot more offers of help from hams," Martin said. "With so many extras, we hit on the idea of putting them in about 10 vans so that we could provide radio dispatching." Working closely with drivers, most of the communication effort involved helping to get doctors and nurses to the hospitals, picking up medical supplies for shut-ins and transporting policemen to their duty stations. Twice volunteers transported sick children to hospitals providing two-way radio contact with the doctors while on the way. James P. White, St. Louis County director of civil preparedness said, "We couldn't have carried out rescue functions without the message center the hams set up and operated."

Boone, North Carolina

On January 6, Ernest Hartley was headed for work in Boone, NC. He came across a Dannon Yogurt delivery truck that had slid off the road and overturned. He put

out an emergency call on his mobile ham radio transceiver. Another ham, John Dinkins, responded and called the police. Ernest reported that the driver was still in the truck, so a rescue squad was dispatched.

After a few minutes, the driver was freed by Ernest and other passersby. Ernest called John on the radio again and cancelled the request for the rescue squad. The driver was treated and released by a local hospital. Ernest noted afterward, "I am happy the driver is OK. I just kept thinking it could have been dangerous chemicals."

In countless other cases Amateur Radio operators aided stranded motorists, reported accidents, called for emergency medical services and provided whatever communications the situation called for. Like other Americans, the hams are glad that this winter is finally over.

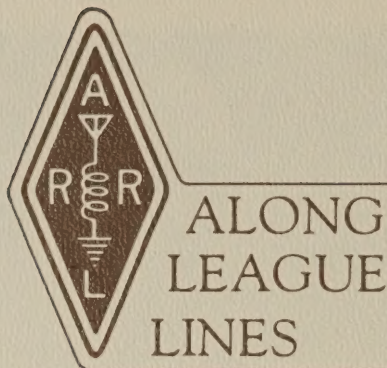
— By Carl Weeks and Peter O'Dell

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will be viewed as renegs. Others will doubt our sincerity. If there are provisions in the document from which the United States needs further protection, (and we know of none), may we plead for these arrangements to be made quickly.

In short, the Radio Amateurs of the United States urge quick ratification — within weeks — of the Radio Regulations (Geneva, 1979) and Final Protocol.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE AMATEUR RADIO SERVICE? Contact Perry Williams, ARRL's Washington Area Coordinator, and arrange for a personal visit by calling (202) 296-9107.



Because radio waves — in all their forms — tend to cross political boundaries with impunity, the nations of the world long ago¹ agreed to decide on uses of the radio spectrum in concert holding for that purpose World Administrative Radio Conferences (WARCs). The most recent conference of this type was held in Geneva in 1979. Its acts were signed by 132 countries; over a ten-week period nearly 14,000 proposals for changes in the Radio Regulations were considered. Almost seventeen hundred pages of fine-print text were developed.

The United States was an important participant in WARC-79. Many of the proposals discussed during the conference came from the U.S. originally. Our delegation was active in committees and working groups, innovative in engineering compromises. Americans were advocates of an early effective date for the Radio Regulations, and supported the January 1, 1982 date which eventually was picked. The views of the United States were honored in most instances: America took

reservations to protect its interests in only six actions of the Conference.

One would suppose, therefore, that we would have been among the first countries to ratify the Radio Regulations (Geneva, 1979) and Final Protocol. Not so. It wasn't until September 25, 1981 that the Secretary of State forwarded the WARC-79 documents to the President with recommendations for ratification; in turn the President sought the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification in a letter dated November 24, 1981.

The matter now lies before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, which tentatively plans to hold hearings in May on the Radio Regulations (Geneva, 1979) and Final Protocol.² ARRL urges that the matter be considered with the greatest dispatch for both practical and philosophical reasons. On the practical level, ratification will give United States interests entree into an expanded a.m. broadcast band; increased allocations for broadcasting, maritime mobile and amateur services; new allocations for military satellite systems; new sharing arrangements for fixed and mobile radio services, and especially the burgeoning Land Mobile Service; and new allocations which would accommodate the NAVSTAR Global Positioning System for radio-navigation via satellite, to cover just a part of the Conference's work.

The philosophical impetus for fast action comes from knowledge that the United States was an advocate of many of the changes, pushing hard at times, twisting arms in a sense. To delay ratification any longer would destroy America's credibility in future conferences. We

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¹A forerunner of today's WARC was held in Berlin in 1903.

²Senate Treaty Document 97-21.



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